

Bedford Sign Bylaw Committee
May 17, 2012, 7:30 PM
Flint Room, Town Center Building

Minutes

Attending: Jeff Cohen, Karen Kenney, Kevin Latady, John McCulloch, Lisa Mustapich, Mark Siegenthaler, Ralph Zazula; Chris Laskey - Staff

Others: Bedford Plaza Hotel – Sal Patel; Boardroom Bistro – David Smerling; Pam Brown; DSA Printing of Chelmsford – Kevin Sullivan; Firebox BBQ – David Goldstone; UPS Store – Mostafa Elmaghraby & Monica Dailey; Watson Law office – Roy Watson

7:30 meeting called to order by Jeff. Although all meetings are public, The Chamber of Commerce was encouraged to invite its members to this one.

As the Chairman, Jeff gave an overview of the Committee's process. The revision will be presented to the Selectmen, Legal, and then Town Meeting in March 2013. The committee is looking at improving the 'one size fits all' approach of the current version; ; addressing the confusing, ambiguous language that the ZBA typically struggles with; and the bylaw could be more business friendly, such as, illumination of signs & sandwich board signs. Jeff shared with the audience the updates proposed to date.

Kevin Sullivan represented DSA Printing, which is no longer located in Bedford. He asked the Committee to consider other incentives to keep business in Bedford. Chelmsford Business Association is aggressive to keep biz in Chelms. He recommended equal tax rates for biz and residential properties. He noted that empty locations are taxed at a lower rate. He also stated that when in Bedford, many years ago, he tried to change the name of his business from Eastern Insurance to DSA Printing. He was not permitted to change the lettering on the sign. He was located at 20 North Rd. Mark pondered if it was a non-conforming sign, and by changing the name he would have been required to bring it into compliance with the bylaw. He also cited an example of the Double Tree Hotel freestanding sign being too small; so small, that people use other nearby signs as landmarks for finding the hotel's location.

David Goldstone represented Firebox. He noted that his business struggles, due to lack of signage. The carwash sign located west of the restaurant blocks eastbound driver's view of his establishment. His windows are tinted, which makes the business look closed at night even though the lights inside are turned on. His parking lot has no illumination, further creating the impression that he is closed. Because the building is set back from the road, and drivers don't see the restaurant as they drive by, he would like the ability to put sandwich boards out front. Off hand, he did not know the size of sandwich board needed, but wants a large one. He cited an example of how effective placing a sandwich board sign in front of this business was in attracting customers for a Thanksgiving turkey special offer. Internally illuminated signs would help. An "open" banner or flag would be nice. Mark explained that he could get Selectmen permission for a sandwich board for special fundraisers, similar to Flatbread fundraisers. It was noted that currently sandwich board signs can only be displayed at two locations in town on Great Road: in front of the DPW building or in front of the Police Station. .

Mostafa Elmaghraby & Monica Dailey spoke on behalf of UPS. They moved to the location less than a year ago. They would like to use the UPS colors on their awning, which is part of their signage. People associate UPS with brown, not blue. They are losing \$. They spent \$70K on the

UPS franchise. No one knows they are there. He is located in the Historic District; as such, the HDC determined that his awning must match the color of the other awnings on the building.

Roy Watson spoke. He said the HDC hassled him about putting the office phone # on the sign. He has no sign issues. He supports the sign bylaw cmte. It's cheaper to keep business in town than to attract new ones. He attended the Comp Plan Workshop #1. Roy's law offices occupy the former "Tea House" building on Great Road and he bought the building next door to use as a residence.

Kevin Latady explained that the HDC was created to protect the character of the historic district.

Roy Watson suggested that instead of focusing on dimensional and aesthetic requirements for sandwich board signs, the committee should consider placing time constraints on when sandwich board signs could be displayed in front of a business, i.e., only to advertise weekly, monthly, or seasonal specials, or allowing the signs to be displayed for "x-days" per month; requiring the signs to be removed when the business is closed. The committee agreed to consider his comments.

Sal Patel spoke on behalf of the Bedford Plaza Hotel. His signs cannot be illuminated between 11 pm and 6 am so no one knows that he's open. Internet drives his business. He's been there 7 years. He would like nighttime sign illumination from 11 pm – 6 am. Lisa recommended he work with Chris Laskey and appear before the ZBA to obtain a Special Permit for nighttime sign illumination.

David Smerling spoke on behalf of the Boardroom Bistro. He already has the largest sign allowed. He asked the Cmte to consider looking at different requirements for different areas of town. He is on Middlesex Tpk, and thinks larger/bolder signs would be appropriate for the commercial industrial nature of that side of town. David said temporary banners and sandwich board signs would help them. He is competing with Billerica businesses on the other side of the street, which have much larger signs than his.

Pam Brown spoke. She said she was glad that the town saw the illuminated bamboo shoots as art as opposed to signage, but what is the definition? She asked the Cmte to tweak the definitions of signs. She asked the Cmte to look at modifying signage requirements for larger campuses, MITRE; Sites with multiple entrances; and allowing signs which cannot be seen from the public way to be exempted from the Sign Bylaw.

Jeff Cohen asked Pam whether it was more important for businesses to be close to the street, as noted by David Goldstone, or have parking in front of their building, as has been asserted by various businesses and developers who've appeared before the Planning Board and ZBA. She said retailers still want the parking in front of the building, it's an industry mentality.

Mustapich moved to approve minutes of May 3, Kenney 2nd. Vote 6-0-1. Latady abstained - he was not at that mtng.

The group discussed page 1, 40.2.A, added the word "from an adjacent public way" to definition at the end of the paragraph after, "building."

The group agreed that we need a definition of "temporary non-commercial sign", and discussed how temp signs reconcile with free speech.

Jeff asked the group to review the redline by Mustapich & bring comments to next meeting, which is June 21, 730 PM.

9:16, Siegenthaler moved to adjourn, Mustapich 2nd. 7-0.

Respectfully submitted by Mustapich.